The part of the dissertation project with which students seem to have the most difficulty is the preparation of a dissertation proposal outlining the research. It is a difficult activity, but one that is crucial in order to achieve the objective of timely completion. The proposal represents the blueprints for the dissertation. If the blueprints are clear and well done, the work can proceed with assurance; if incomplete and unclear, there is likely to be considerable misdirected effort.

The process of preparing a dissertation proposal is iterative. The student prepares a proposal and solicits reactions from advisor, committee, and colleagues. Based on these comments, the candidate prepares a revision. This is criticized and a new revision is prepared. There may be an opportunity for the candidate to present the proposal to a seminar. The comments will result in further revision. The process should continue until the proposal is a clear, crisp definition of the research project. This approach to development of a dissertation proposal is equally effective in preparing a master's thesis proposal.

The use of topic analysis forms to outline topics is recommended in the formative stages when several alternative topics are being considered. When one topic is chosen, the topic analysis can be expanded into a dissertation proposal. The dissertation proposal then proceeds through several iterations until the research is sufficiently well defined for the proposal to be accepted.
The Topic Analysis

A student will usually consider several possible dissertation topics, or alternative approaches to the same problem, prior to selecting a final topic. The various possible topics should be analyzed as early as possible in terms of their suitability. A student who talks vaguely about doing a thesis on decision-making in organizations does not yet have a dissertation topic because, within that general area, one might construct hundreds of possible dissertations. The problem is to identify several topics, prepare a topic analysis for each, and then choose the one which best meets the selection criteria. Unless the advisor has a specific problem in mind for the student to undertake, the student will get better advice by presenting several alternative analyses to the advisor or committee than by bringing in only one. The alternatives also act as a catalyst for bringing out fresh ideas as the student discusses the area of proposed investigation.

THE TOPIC ANALYSIS FORM

The topic analysis is essentially a simplified proposal form, providing a rough outline of factors relating to a dissertation. The parts are as follows:
1. Problem, hypothesis, or question
2. Importance of research (why it is worthy of doctoral research)
3. Significant prior research
4. Possible research approach or methodology
5. Potential outcomes of research and importance of each

Figure 6-1 is an example of a topic analysis. The topic analysis should be quite short—two to four pages should be sufficient in most cases. A short, concise description is needed at this juncture. A few comments about each section may help in preparing this type of analysis.

TOPIC ANALYSIS

Student Clark G. Flint  Date September 29, 19—

1. Problem, Hypothesis, or Question
   Decision models are built to handle risk aversion by the users, but human decision makers are erratic in risk aversion responses.
   Major questions in area are:
   1. What are the major determinants of variations in risk aversion behavior by human decision makers?
   2. Is relative risk aversion constant across problem situations?
   3. Does experience reduce variations in risk aversion?
   4. Can education or simulated experience reduce variations in risk aversion?
   The 4th question is the one to be researched.

2. Importance of Research
   In the design of decision systems, a decision maker with a given risk aversion is usually assumed. But there is evidence (such as Allen, "Risk Aversion in Production Scheduling," *Journal of Business Research*, July 1971, pp. 475–490) that the decision models are less effective than one would hope because of variations in patterns of risk aversion. There is, therefore, a need to evaluate methods for reducing variations in risk aversion by a decision maker. Burnham states, "There is an urgent need to understand the risk aversion phenomenon and to find and evaluate mechanisms for altering risk aversion behavior if the new decision systems are to be effective."

3. Significant Prior Research
   There are a number of studies of risk aversion as determined by personality and environment. Hurst ("Constancy of Risk Aversion," *Journal of Decision Psychology*, January 1969, pp. 120–131) experimented with 10 college students and concluded that absolute risk aversion was affected by the problem, but the relative risk aversion evidenced by different subjects was not changed. Wadell ("Effect of Trauma on Risk Aversion," *Journal of Decision Psychology*, February 1970, pp. 5–14) ran experiments which suggest traumatic experience is effective in changing risk aversion for broad classes of related phenomena. No reported research has been found on the effect of education and simulated experience on reducing variations in risk aversion.

6-1.
4. Possible Research Approach or Methodology

Five methodologies for research are possible. One or more may be used. 1-3 are proposed.

1. Use a group of students and measure variations in risk aversion behavior prior to taking the Decision Sciences course in Fall Quarter, immediately following the course in December, and 6 months after taking the course in May.

2. Use a group of inventory controllers taking a course in scientific inventory management. Measurement before, after, and 6 months after.

3. Use a group of students and measure the change in variability of risk aversion after using the inventory management decision simulator, which provides experience in handling uncertainty by means of decision rules.

4. Use a group of inventory controllers and measure change after use of inventory management decision simulator.

5. Observe changes in card playing behavior (Poker and Hearts) by students who have received instruction in assessing the probability of certain combinations of cards.

Instruments: An instrument to measure risk aversion variation would have to be constructed and validated. Perhaps it could be constructed from parts of existing personality tests, such as the Alison battery and the Jann test for objectivity.

The inventory management decision simulator is available. A data generator to produce the desired stimuli would need to be added.

6-1 cont’d.

5. Potential Outcomes of Research and Importance of Each

Outcomes are contributions in part of cases; others probably not.

1. Immediate Effect of Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Controllers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Variability Reduced</td>
<td>Contribution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variability Increased</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Effect</td>
<td>No contribution</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. 6-Month Effect of Education. Same as 1.

3. Effect of Simulated Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students Only</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Variability Reduced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variability Increased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Effect</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The increase in variability is difficult to interpret and is not as strong a contribution as reduction in variability, unless a theoretical basis for the result can be found.

6-1 cont’d. Topic analysis form (all references, etc., are hypothetical).

Problem, hypothesis, or question This states what the dissertation will deal with. If hypotheses are appropriate, they should be stated. If the type of topic is not amenable to statement as a hypothesis, then the problem or question should be clearly stated.
Importance of the research  This addresses the question of whether or not the research is important or significant enough to justify doing. If there is some statement by an authority as to need for this research, or if it can be demonstrated that this research is significant to a major activity, then this or related reasons should be concisely stated in a short paragraph. The importance of a dissertation need not be earth-shaking, but no dissertation should deal with a trivial or inconsequential topic.

Significant prior research  This part mentions the major preceding research. It need not be exhaustive when topics are being selected, but the student should make a quick investigation, taking perhaps ten to twenty hours, to look at the major research work on the topic.

The possible research approach or methodology  This section of the topic analysis is extremely important because it outlines how the student proposes to approach the research. Is it via questionnaire, simulation, data collection, measurement, or algorithm solution? The approach should be explained as precisely as possible but may still be in a very rough form. Alternative methodology should be included. Most doctoral candidates have taken a research methodology course which described alternative methodologies. Appendix II provides selected references which may be used to supplement the student’s course knowledge.

The potential outcomes and importance of each  The contents of this section are vital to an assessment of the dissertation proposal. For each research approach, the different but possible outcomes should be described. For example, a topic analysis might propose a project to collect evidence by a questionnaire. Then the questionnaire results would be analyzed statistically to determine if there is a positive correlation between perceived behavior and the responses to questions. The potential outcomes might be:

1. A significant positive correlation demonstrating the relationship;
2. A significant negative correlation demonstrating the reverse of what was expected;
3. A lack of correlation (probably proving nothing);
4. An inability to obtain satisfactory responses on the questionnaire.

In this particular case, perhaps only one of the potential outcomes might be expected to result in an acceptable dissertation. But it may be possible to structure the data collection and analysis so that a negative correlation might also turn out to be acceptable.

The topic analysis has the objective of assisting the candidate in eliciting helpful comments and alternative suggestions. Therefore, if there are viable alternatives, these should be included (or prepared as a separate topic). Note in the sample shown in Figure 6-1 that several alternatives are suggested, and one is indicated as being preferable.

SELECTING AMONG THE ALTERNATIVE TOPICS

Some topics can be eliminated from further consideration because time or cost are too great. The dissertation advisor and committee may reject other topics as unsuitable. One topic may turn out to be far superior and end the selection process. However, if there are several topics to choose among, the selection should proceed by assessing for each topic the following two probabilities:

1. The probability of successful completion  To assist in this assessment, make two lists for each topic.
   a. A list of the expected chapters in the dissertation
   b. A list of major activities required to do the dissertation together with time estimates for each

   If it is difficult or impossible to outline the dissertation and the steps to complete it, this indicates potential difficulty in completion. Students frequently indicate they will perform a simulation, build a prototype, establish an experiment. It is important to assess the difficulty of carry-
ing out such activities. If it cannot be planned, it probably cannot be done.

2. The probability of acceptance of the completed research as a dissertation. This consists of two sets of probabilities.
   a. The probability that each of the outcomes will make a contribution to knowledge
   b. The probability that the committee will accept each of the results as a contribution

There are, of course, other factors such as personal preference, personal standards of research quality, the dissertation as a basis for future work, and professional development.

The final decision is a personal one, but a student should be aware of the relative risks of various topics. A candidate may still choose a risky topic over a "safe" topic, but the choice should be made with an awareness of the risk.

The Proposal

The idea of the topic analysis was to make it short so that it would be feasible to prepare several for alternative topics. When one of these topics is finally chosen, the dissertation proposal should be prepared. It is an expansion of the topic analysis and will be used as a work plan for the dissertation. Whereas a topic analysis of two to four pages was adequate, a complete final proposal might contain ten to thirty pages. The structure of the proposal (with some idea of reasonable page length) is approximately as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section of Proposal</th>
<th>Reasonable Page Length</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Summary</td>
<td>1 - 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Hypothesis, problem, or question</td>
<td>1 - 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Importance of topic</td>
<td>1 - 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Prior research on topic</td>
<td>1 - 7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Research approach or research methodology 2 - 8
6. Limitations and key assumptions 1 - 2
7. Contributions to knowledge (for each potential outcome, if there are more than one) 1 - 3
8. Descriptions of proposed chapters in dissertation 2 - 3

The summary section of the proposal contains one or two paragraphs summarizing what the dissertation project is to do and how it is to do it. The hypothesis, problem, or question section is similar to the same section in the topic analysis but is amplified and refined. The same holds true for the section on the importance of the topic.

The prior research section should be expanded over that which was included in the topic analysis. It should be more comprehensive because there should now be a search of all major sources of information. If there has been considerable prior work, it can be summarized. This section might consist of from one to five pages. Too many pages indicate a need for summarization, since this is the proposal, not the dissertation itself.

The research approach or research methodology section should be as explicit as possible. The data collection or experiment should be explained. If a questionnaire is to be used, for example, the questionnaire methodology should be explained, and perhaps examples of the major types of questions to be asked should be mentioned. Population and selection or sampling procedures should be outlined. If a simulation is to be used, the major elements of the simulation should be defined. If an experimental situation is to be used to collect data, there should be a description covering the subjects, the apparatus to be used, procedures to be followed, data to be collected, and the instruments to be used in data collection. Obviously, there are
many unanswered questions. The idea is to sketch the research approach as clearly as possible. Major questions yet to be decided should be listed.

The *limitations or key assumptions* section is important because it defines the limits of the dissertation work. It is common for students to try to do too much, and the limitations and key assumptions section is useful in defining how much the student will undertake, and in describing key assumptions to govern the building of the model or conducting of the experiment. This should be very explicit—"The research will not . . . ."

The *contributions* section is similar to the section in the topic analysis and can be written in more detail.

The *chapter descriptions* are an attempt to further define the dissertation. Each chapter can be described in terms of its major headings or by a short paragraph describing what will be covered in that chapter. It should be as specific as possible, but since this is a proposal document, the chapter descriptions should be brief and highlight the structure rather than give much detail. Most dissertations follow a standard format consisting of the following chapters or sections:

1. *The introduction* The general problem area, the specific problem, why the topic is important, research approach of the dissertation, limitations and key assumptions, and contribution to be made by the research are described.

2. *A description of what has been done in the past* This is a rather complete survey of prior research. If prior research is very limited, this description might be combined with Chapter 1; if there is extensive prior research, the results might have to be divided into two or more chapters. The prior research review is normally an important section of the dissertation because the description of what has been done provides background to the research. It also documents the fact that the candidate's research is unique because the work of the dissertation has not been covered by prior research.

3. *A description of the research methodology* One or more chapters may be used to describe the research method. For example, the chapter(s) might describe a simulation, a data collection technique, a measurement technique, an experiment, or an historical method of analysis. In essence, this section describes how the research was conducted.

4. *The research results* The results of the chosen methodology are reported; the data are presented, the conceptual framework is described, the historical analysis is defined, or the comparative studies are explained.

5. *Analysis of the results* This may be included with prior chapters depending upon the type of dissertation. This is a key section because it explains the conclusions that can be drawn from the data and the implications of a theory.

6. *Summary and conclusions* The dissertation is summarized with emphasis upon the results obtained and the contribution made by these results. Suggestions for further research are also outlined.

With the general structure of a dissertation plus the characteristics of the specific dissertation in mind, the student is usually able to define the chapters of the dissertation. The chapter descriptions are frequently very useful in helping to focus on the objective of a completed, accepted dissertation.

The proposal is a plan for the student to follow. It also provides the dissertation committee with information by which they can approve or reject the project. Approval does not mean automatic approval of the dissertation. But if the proposal is explicit, the committee approval implies that when the proposed work is done properly and clearly documented in a dissertation, there is a high probability that the dissertation will be accepted. A well-done proposal, when accepted by the committee, forms a type of contract (in a personal rather than a legal sense) between the candidate and the committee.
Refining a Proposal

The first proposal is not usually the final proposal. There is a process of refining in which reviews, critical comments, and suggestions are incorporated into revised drafts which are reviewed. The end result of the review and rewriting (and perhaps starting over with a new proposal) is a complete, crisply defined proposal.

The process of moving from an idea for a dissertation to a concise, well-defined proposal is sometimes the most difficult task of the entire dissertation. It is not unusual for candidates to take six, eight, ten, or more months to get a topic defined. There is no simple recipe for approaching the process, but some hints may prove helpful.

NARROWING THE SCOPE

The point needs to be repeated—almost every student starts with a project that is too large. One way to narrow the dissertation topic is to attempt to subdivide it into more than one dissertation. The subdivisions are each analyzed as a topic. The result may be to choose only one of the subdivisions, and this will usually prove to be a smaller, more manageable topic. For example, a student who wished to study the writing of doctoral dissertations might start out with the topic: “An investigation of the Factors Affecting Completion of High Quality Doctoral Dissertations and a Proposed Method for Improving Performance.” This can be subdivided into at least three topics, for example, the following:

1. An investigation into the time taken to complete dissertations
2. An investigation into the factors affecting the quality of a doctoral dissertation
3. An investigation into a systematic method for managing a doctoral dissertation with some results from a pilot application

Note that by separating out three dissertations, the scope of each is much better defined and much more likely to be completed.

The student might also consider what the research is trying to accomplish—what he or she hopes to get as a result. If this is difficult to define, a useful technique is to imagine the dissertation is complete and the final chapter with summary and conclusions is being written. What will be the conclusions? What might be the main points of the results? By trying to draft the conclusions, the main thrust of the dissertation should become clearer and this will help to narrow the scope.

CLARIFYING THE PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

Students should try to avoid a “fishing” approach to research. A student who collects much data and then applies multiple regression techniques to “see what comes out” is not likely to be able to differentiate between spurious and real correlation or to have collected all relevant data. This example is perhaps obvious, but students who collect data or begin interviews without a clear idea of objectives are likely to commit the same fault.

One of the best ways to define the objectives of the research is by the statement of hypotheses which the research methodology will accept or reject. For example, the first of the previous examples of dissertation topics might be stated as a hypothesis that “time taken by candidates to complete doctoral dissertations is a function of: (list).” By listing the factors, the data collection methodology and analysis procedures can be related to the factors that are thought to be important. It is sometimes useful to introduce a competing theory rather than only defining null hypotheses based on a single theory.

Some topics are not amenable to hypotheses statements. For example, conceptual development and comparative analysis are not usually amenable to hypothesis statements. The third example of a topic was the investigation of a systematic dissertation management method and pilot study. Since this topic is
difficult to state as a hypothesis, the research methodology can be clarified and defined by restating the topic in terms of a set of objectives for the research, such as the following:

1. To develop a useful approach for the use of doctoral candidates (approach will be synthesized from management theory and psychological theory)
2. To support the validity of the approach by reference to research and theory in management and psychology
3. To demonstrate feasibility of approach in a pilot study
4. To provide support (but not statistical evidence) for utility of approach by a pilot study

Note the fact that the student plans to build an approach (a model of the dissertation completion process) using accepted theory from other fields. Experimental and other evidence from these fields that have been reported in the literature will be used to support the fact that the conceptual structure is sound. The pilot study is very useful (although not always necessary) in demonstrating the feasibility of the approach. A small pilot study may also provide data suggesting the utility of the approach, but the sample is usually too small to be statistically significant.

CHECKING FEASIBILITY OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Despite the advice to delay data collection until a proposal is prepared, there are some cases where some preliminary investigation is very desirable to check the feasibility of research. Some examples will illustrate such situations.

Case 1: The proposed dissertation research methodology is highly dependent on the use of a panel of experts. There should be some discussion with one or more experts during topic formulation in order to get some insight into the practicality of the technique and the probability of obtaining usable data.

Case 2: The proposed methodology involves the initiation of a prototype instructional program in the school. The success of the dissertation is dependent on a school’s willingness to have a prototype program and the availability of persons to carry it out. There should be some preliminary investigation during the proposal writing stage to assess the probability of these conditions being satisfied for the research.

Case 3: The proposed methodology into the time taken for doctoral dissertations requires that a sample of recent doctorates and a sample of “all but dissertation” candidates, at varying stages of completion, be surveyed. This is dependent on locating the current address of these subjects. A preliminary investigation of the quality and availability of the university address files is important in assessing the feasibility of the methodology. A pretest of a proposed questionnaire might provide evidence on both the questionnaire and the address file.

The illustrations show that there are times when some preliminary investigation is required to get sufficient insight on the problem, the methodology, or the state of the data in order to be able to make a good proposal. In these cases, it is wise to draft the clearest proposal possible before conducting the investigations. After these investigations, revise the proposal. A first draft proposal will serve as a guide to the preliminary investigations.

EVALUATING FEASIBILITY VIA A SCENARIO

One method for testing feasibility is to write a short scenario, or outline, of the actions, activities, and responses that can be expected as the dissertation research proceeds through the crucial phases. Such a scenario may reveal some very important data collection or analysis steps which are difficult or impossible
to perform. If a student cannot visualize a research scenario from the current point through to completion, it is likely that the research topic is not a good one.

PROPOSAL SEMINARS

Proposal seminars (either formal or informal) can subject the proposal to the ideas of a larger group. Such a presentation should be made as soon as a fairly complete proposal is written instead of waiting until the research work is well in progress. If the faculty have not provided such a review, the doctoral candidates in an area may wish to do this on an informal basis. A student may get so close to a problem that he or she cannot see it in perspective; a review session with faculty or other students may help to clarify the proposal. It is important that such seminars be supportive and helpful rather than a “mini exam,” so that candidates will seek advice and constructive criticism. At one university, the proposal seminars became so critical of the research that candidates would not present a proposal until they were almost finished with the research. This negates the major benefit which should come from the seminar—to help the student evaluate (and further define) a proposed topic under investigation.

METHODS OF PRESENTING THE PROPOSED RESEARCH

The ways in which the proposed research is presented can often help define the dissertation proposal. Two examples will illustrate the method of presentation as a factor in clarifying the dissertation.

Example 1: Four researchers have done work with a population similar to that being proposed. The dissertation proposal needs to show the relationship of the prior research to the proposed research in

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic of Research Design</th>
<th>Researcher</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
<th>Experimental Method</th>
<th>Type of Reinforcement</th>
<th>Reinforcement Schedule</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allon &amp; Michael</td>
<td>Hospitalized schiz &amp; mental defectives</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2 phase baseline period treatment</td>
<td>Approval &amp; ignoring</td>
<td>Intermittent on 1 to 3 intervals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aylion &amp; Azrin</td>
<td>Hospitalized chronic females</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>3 phase; contingent, non-contingent, and contingent</td>
<td>Tokens awarded to be exchanged for goods</td>
<td>6 experiments each with different reinforcement schedule</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athowe &amp; Krasner</td>
<td>Hospitalized veterans 22 yr. median stay</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>3 phase: baseline, 3 mo. shaping, and 11 mo. treatment</td>
<td>Tokens and social approval</td>
<td>Contingent on behavior specified in advance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panek</td>
<td>Same as Athowe &amp; Krasner</td>
<td>Compared common associates learning with token reinforcement and punishment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposal</td>
<td>Day Treatment Center Veterans</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>2 phase; 2 week baseline and 8 wk. treatment</td>
<td>Tokens worth five cents</td>
<td>Contingent on behavior specified in advance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6-2. An example research comparison table as a method of relating a research proposal to prior research in a field.
order to (1) define both the similarities and the differences, and (2) evaluate the potential contributions of the proposed research. These objectives can be achieved by presenting the past research and proposed research in a research comparison table (Figure 6-2).

Example 2: The proposal has a hypothesis that there will be changes in career development after the introduction of a career exploration unit in a tenth grade English class. The testing of the hypothesis hinges on the operational definition of “career maturity,” as it relates to the particular classroom exercises. The table of expected research effects (Figure 6-3) was prepared to show which scales in a career maturity inventory might be expected to change because of the experimental intervention. The “X” indicates where change in scale scores might be expected because of the classroom exercise. The “0” indicates no change is expected.

A CHECKLIST

The following checklist is not exhaustive, but it suggests useful questions a student should ask during a self-appraisal of the proposal.

1. Does the proposal have imagination?
2. Is the problem stated clearly?
   a. Are the hypotheses clear, unambiguous, and testable?
   b. If no hypotheses, are the objectives clearly stated? Can they be accomplished?
   c. Is the problem too large in scope?
3. Is the methodology feasible?
   a. Can data be collected?
   b. How will data be analyzed?
   c. Will the analysis allow the acceptance or rejection of the hypothesis?
   d. Is the population to be sampled overused? (Navajos must be tired of anthropologists, and Fortune’s 500 companies must be tired of surveys.)
4. What might the results of the analysis look like? (A useful technique in clarifying the proposal is to try to sketch the form of the tables or other results from the data analysis. The axes of graphs can be labeled and the probable shape of curves estimated. The expected results from correlation, factor analysis, or analysis of variance can be sketched.)
5. What are the consequences to the dissertation if—
   a. the experiment fails;
   b. data cannot be obtained (for each major item of data);

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Career Maturity Inventory Scale</th>
<th>Effect of Classroom Exercises</th>
<th>Self-Concept Exploration Topic</th>
<th>Satisfactions and Rewards of Work Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attitude Scale</td>
<td>X = change expected</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Involvement in choice process</td>
<td>X = change expected</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Orientation toward work</td>
<td>X = change expected</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Preference for career choice</td>
<td>X = change expected</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Independence in decision making</td>
<td>X = change expected</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) Conceptions of the choice process</td>
<td>X = change expected</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence Test</td>
<td>X = change expected</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Knowing yourself</td>
<td>X = change expected</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Knowing occupations</td>
<td>X = change expected</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Choosing the job</td>
<td>X = change expected</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Planning for the job</td>
<td>X = change expected</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) Problem solving ability</td>
<td>X = change expected</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
c. only a small amount of data exists;

    d. the analysis is inconclusive;

    e. the hypothesis is rejected or accepted?

6. Can major research activities be listed?

7. Can a time estimate be attached to each major activity?

8. Is the dissertation trying to do too much?

9. If yes to 8, what can be dropped or reduced to make the project of manageable dimensions?

10. If the student will have to complete elsewhere (against good advice, but it does happen), is the dissertation portable; i.e., can it be completed away from the university?

The Dissertation Time Schedule and Budget

While the proposal is being refined, the student should also prepare a time budget and time schedule. Students (and professors) tend to underestimate the time required for completing a dissertation. A formal, detailed estimating approach is likely to yield a better estimate than an overall estimate without any breakdown. All of the estimates use work hours or work months (of 175 work hours). These are converted into elapsed time by a separate computation, taking into account the percentage of time a student can work on the dissertation.

Standard Times

There are no standards for how long a dissertation should take.¹ Some estimates were presented in Chapter 2. These will be expanded in this chapter as bases for preparing a time schedule.

Table 7-1 presents the authors' estimates of the time required for doctoral dissertations. The basis for standard time is the estimated median time for doing a good dissertation if the student follows a systematic approach to the management of the

¹There have been some studies of the time dimension. These studies note some variability in time taken. For example, dissertations for English departments take substantially longer than average. For a listing of books dealing with this subject, consult the bibliography.
CHAPTER 8

Working with an Advisor and a Dissertation Committee

The advisor is a crucial figure in the completion of a dissertation. The university entrusts the advisor with considerable power and responsibility in the dissertation acceptance process. The committee members are also important but less so than the advisor. The view of this chapter is that the advisor and committee have the responsibility of assisting the candidate; the student has the responsibility of presenting material in order to effectively use the scarce advisor and committee resource. This chapter explores procedures the student can follow to help make interaction with the advisor and committee effective. Problems can arise in this relationship. Students may get so involved in their research problem that they forget advisors are human beings. The chapter explores typical situations and possible solutions.

Aids to Effective Interaction with an Advisor and a Committee

The student should recognize that there are many demands on the advisor for time and attention, and there frequently are inter-

Candidate: Clark G. Flint Date of Meeting: Oct. 16, 1977

Summary of Meeting with PH.D. Committee

In attendance: R. G. Smith, Advisor
              John Hoffmann
              Gary Gray

Absent: William Jones

1. Review of Revised Outline of Chapter One
   The committee expressed agreement with the revised outline. Professor Gray asked that the section on ethnic foundations of the problem be expanded to include the recent research by Maxwell and Pawlofski. This was agreed upon.

2. Review of Proposed Data Collection Procedure
   The proposed method of paired samples was approved. After reviewing the computations of sample size, the committee suggested that a sample size of 100 instead of 150 would be sufficient. The final decision will await the results of a pretest of a sample of 10.

3. Review of Revised Dissertation Schedule
   The revised schedule, calling for final reading of the first draft in July, was discussed. Professor Hoffmann indicated a change in plans makes a July reading not feasible, but he will be able to read it in the first week of August. The schedule was therefore revised to a faculty return of first draft manuscript by August 9.

4. Next Meeting and Other Reviews
   a. A sampling plan review with Professor Euwe of the statistics department has been scheduled for November by the candidate.
   b. A review of the experimental procedures prior to the pretest is scheduled with Professor Smith on November 9.
   c. The pretest will be conducted November 12-13. A written report of the pretest will be distributed on November 21.
   d. The committee agreed to review the results of the pretest on November 28 at 2:00 p.m. in the 6th floor conference room. The meeting is planned for about 1 hour.

8-1. Report of committee meeting.
ruptions which keep the advisor from devoting attention to the candidate. The candidate's problem is usually how to improve the probability of a timely and helpful response from the advisor. The suggested method consists of written notes, outlines, issue summaries, scheduled times for meetings, and meeting agendas.

1. **Provide written notes of meetings.** When meeting with the committee, the candidate should make notes. Immediately after the meeting he or she should write up these notes, summarizing what was talked about and any conclusions that were reached. The candidate should keep a file of the notes and provide copies of all notes to the advisor and, perhaps, to the committee, if relevant. If there have been a number of quick "question and answer" contacts with the committee, the candidate may wish to summarize the significant ones every two weeks.

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**Candidate:** Clark G. Flint  
**Date:** November 1, 1977

**Summary of Sampling Plan Review**

A sampling plan review was held with Professor Euwe of the statistics department. Professor Euwe has had prior experience with this type of problem.

Professor Euwe agreed to the general procedure but expressed reservations about the adequacy of a sample size of 100 for discriminating the effects of cultural background. He reserved judgment until the pretest results.

He suggested that the statistics department "Cross Cultural Analysis Program" would provide an appropriate computer analysis of the data.

I have examined the program documentation, and it provides all analysis we have agreed upon except the h index which I will program separately.

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**Student:** Clark G. Flint  
**Date:** January 15, 1978

**TO:** Dissertation Committee: Smith, Hoffman, Gray and Jones

Attached is the draft of Chapter 2 for your review and comments. The committee agreed upon January 31 as the date for comments to be returned. It would be most helpful to me if I could have your comments by that date. I would appreciate having your comments on some ideas listed on an attached issue summary.

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**8-3. Transmittal memo.**
Student: Clark G. Flint  
Date: January 2, 1978

Issue Summary for Chapter 2

This chapter discusses past research on the influence of cultural background on decision-making style. Important issues to be noted in the chapter are:

1. Cultural definition is defined. Note that I have not included the Murphy factors for reasons described in the chapter. Do you have comments?
2. The research of O'Neil and Elwin is rejected. Because of its lack of control, the results are considered to be dubious. Do you agree with this rejection?

8-4. Issue summary.

tion of each issue (or area in material) to which the reader should direct attention or for which the candidate would especially like comments. (See Figure 8-4.)

c. Outline of each chapter These outline the major headings. If only one or two chapters are being provided, it is helpful to attach the outline of all chapters, so the reader can keep the material received in context. (See Figure 8-5.)

d. The material to be read This should always be double spaced and typed. The candidate should keep a control copy and the readers should write notes on their copy.

3. Schedule meetings. Plan ahead and schedule the necessary meetings. A schedule for the dissertation work and a schedule of critical reviews (described previously) should assist the candidate and the advisor in deciding on the meetings to schedule. Distribute materials at least a week before (and longer if a large number of pages). Send a separate reminder notice of the meeting. Arrange well in advance for a place to hold the meeting if this is a problem. A good policy is to schedule the next meeting at the conclusion of the current meeting, since there can be a group discussion and resolution of conflicts in schedules.

4. Provide action agendas for meeting. The candidate's advisor acts as chairman of the meeting, but the candidate should discuss with the advisor whether or not a proposed draft agenda would be useful. Or the student may
prefer to be less formal and merely discuss meeting objectives. However, an agenda should still be prepared, either by the student or by the advisor. After the advisor approves the agenda, it should be sent along with the reminder notice to those who are to attend. The agenda should describe each point to be discussed and decisions, if any, to be made (Figure 8-6).

5. *Provide written responses and periodic progress reports.* If a committee member asks a question that the candidate cannot answer immediately, but for which he or she agrees to provide an answer later, the answer should be written and sent (keeping a copy for his or her file). The file of reports, agendas, and questions forms a partial diary of the candidate's activity.

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**AGENDA**

**CLARK G. FLINT DISSERTATION MEETING**

November 8, 1977
3:15 p.m. in BA 6th Floor Seminar Room

1. Discussion of Chapter 3. Specific points to discuss are:
   a. Sampling plan
   b. Questionnaire, especially part II
   c. Problem of analysis of comments

2. Report of computer program to be used in analysis

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A periodic written progress report is useful if the candidate is not meeting regularly with the committee. For example, if a student leaves the university or the professor goes on short-term leave so that there is a lack of personal contact, a regular (monthly or bi-monthly) report is desirable. It is frustrating to have an advisee who is supposed to be working on a dissertation but who never reports in. Even a short half-page summary is better than no report.

**Advisor and Committee Problems and Suggested Solutions**

Even if a candidate approaches the advisor/committee relationship as described, there can be problems. No one can advise about these matters in advance, but some ideas may help a candidate if one of these problems occurs.

1. *The advisor goes on leave, goes to another university, takes a non-university position, or dies.* The regulations of the university will govern in each case, but a good dissertation file will assist in making a change when an advisor dies or leaves the university. If the candidate has followed a well-planned and well-documented dissertation strategy, one of the other members of the committee will probably be willing to take over. Or another member of the department may be asked to serve. A more sensitive situation arises when the advisor goes on leave. Often another member of the committee can serve as temporary advisor until the advisor returns. If, however, the advisor is the key person affecting the completion of the dissertation (and he or she is agreeable), the candidate may wish to follow him or her to the new location. When counting the cost of such an action, the student must also count the cost of a delay in the dissertation. In most
cases, however, the advisor role can be taken over by another. The current advisor should advise as to a replacement. Before a change is made, the student should frankly discuss with both the current advisor and the proposed replacement, who the advisor will be in the event the current advisor should return before the thesis is complete.

Many universities allow faculty members who go to another university to continue to act as advisors for candidates in process. Again, the decision to keep the old advisor or to get a new one depends on how critical the advisor is to the success of the dissertation and on the stage of the dissertation. If the dissertation is almost finished, the current advisor should be used; if just begun, a new advisor should probably be sought.

2. One of the committee goes on leave. The problem is similar to that of an advisor, except the advisor will assist in making a decision on committee replacement.

3. The advisor or committee members will not read the drafts. A common complaint by students is that faculty will not read prepared drafts. But students frequently make it difficult. Contrast the following two approaches and consider which is most likely to yield results.

   Typical: Student suddenly appears with drafts. No chapter outlines or issue lists. Professor feels as if the draft will require hours of concentrated time to read and comment. It is difficult to find such a large block of time.

   Better: Student has provided advance notice of material to be read, and committee have agreed on dates for return of material. Chapters have

   outlines and issue lists, so that the professor may segment the task of review.

   In the case of an advisor who does not read the drafts, it is sometimes useful to try to get him to make a commitment as to a date when the draft will be read and request that he schedule a meeting of the committee to discuss the drafts. If this is not an appropriate strategy, the best tactic is to ask for the best estimate of completion and return on that date. Keep repeating the process. Meanwhile, keep working. A well-defined dissertation will allow such parallel development.

   If a committee member delays excessively in reading a draft, the advisor may assist. If there is an outline and an issue summary, the student may suggest a verbal discussion with the committee member of the points on the issue list.

4. The advisor becomes intransigent or obstructionistic. Fortunately, it doesn’t happen often. In most cases, it is probably best for the student to talk privately with him and express his concerns. One should state feelings, but not accuse. It promotes better, freer discussion to say “I feel that you no longer think I can complete the dissertation.” The advisor may be reacting negatively to some of the student’s behavior. The student may have been discourteous or there may have been an honest difference about the research. If the discussion does not resolve the issue, the student can wait a little to see if things work out. If the problem continues, the student should explore whether or not the advisor wishes to continue. If the professor wishes to be released as an advisor, the student should select a new advisor; if not, the student must try to work it out again. A student may get
some help from others on the committee or other faculty, but this is generally the last resort rather than the first action.

5. **One of the committee becomes intransigent or obstructionistic.** The advisor is usually the key, but first a talk with the committee person, expressing fears and asking if there is something that should be changed, may be in order. It is generally easier to change committee members than an advisor, but it is far better to have the member request the change (on the basis of work load, change in interest for dissertation) than for a change to be forced.

6. **Someone else publishes the same research the student is doing.** This is rarely a problem in the social sciences. Two people who work on the same topic, but employ different methodology, can generally both claim a contribution. However, it may present some problems. The student should examine carefully what the other researcher has done and note differences in purpose, scope, and methodology. Look for the unanswered questions that the other researcher has not explored. Generally, with a little extra work, the student can add to and extend what has been done. Probably only one-fourth or one-fifth of the total dissertation time is connected with the key “contribution” factors, so even a complete duplication, requiring restructuring of the contribution elements, is not the same as starting over. The danger of such duplication is reduced by timely completion. It is the person who spends five years on a dissertation who is generally caught by duplication.

7. **The dissertation is rejected.** If the committee decision or the final oral result in a rejection of the dissertation, what then? If the student has been following a suitable schedule of reviews, it is unlikely the committee will reject the dissertation. Rather, they are likely to suggest modifications. Tired and worn-out as the candidate may feel at this point, he or she should respond to the requests, and the dissertation will generally be accepted. It is useful to get criticisms that are expressed in terms of what needs to be done. Professorial courtesy will generally allow committee members to suggest minor modifications without objection from other members. But if such suggestion(s) will present a real problem, it is appropriate for the student to ask if the suggested work is necessary for the acceptance of the dissertation. The committee members will often make suggestions not only for revision of the dissertation but also suggestions for future work on the topic after acceptance of the dissertation. A suggestion involving considerable research will often fit into the future work category.
Writing the Doctoral Dissertation
A SYSTEMATIC APPROACH

by

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